

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0059
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1473

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, PGOV, NI, DM
SUBJ: AFRICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NIGERIA: BENIN

REF: STATE 208244

1. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) HAS A PRODIGAL LITTLE BROTHER RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS NEIGHBOR NIGERIA. IT HAS NEVER OPENLY CHALLENGED OR OPPOSED THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT, INDEED GPRB PRAISE OF THE FMG IS EFFUSIVE AT TIMES, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES AND BENINESE WORRIES ABOUT ITS NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY CLOUD THE RELATIONSHIP. NIGERIA TENDS TO FOLLOW A POLICY OF "BENIGN NEGLECT" IN DEALING WITH BENIN, AND IN GENERAL CONCENTRATES ITS DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS ON MATTERS OF SPECIFIC INTEREST: TRANSIT TRADE TO NIGERIA THROUGH BENIN AND FROM THE COTONOU PORT, SUGAR AND CEMENT PROJECTS IN BENIN FOR FUTURE EXPORT TO NIGERIA, POLICE COOPERATION FOR PURSUIT OF NIGERIAN CRIMINALS FLEEING INTO BENIN. SENIOR RESIDENT NIGERIAN DIPLOMATS
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USUALLY ADOPT A "PROCONSUL" ATTITUDE TOWARD BENIN, VIEWING IT AS FRANCOPHONE PROVINCE OF NIGERIA, AND TEND TO DISREGARD BENINESE POLICIES AND POLITICS AS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE. BECAUSE OF THE PROXIMITY OF COTONOU TO THE BORDER, NIGERIAN AMBASSADORS OFTEN SEEM TO BE ACTUALLY RESIDENT IN LAGOS.

2. TRIBALISM PLAYS AN UNDERLYING ROLE IN BENINESE-NIGERIAN

DIFFERENCES. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT KEREKOU IS A SOMBA, ONE OF THE MANY VOLTAIQUE TRIBES OF NORTHWESTERN BENIN, THE DOMINANT GROUP IN BENINESE CIVIL SERVICE AND OFFICER CORPS REMAINS THE FON. FON-YORUBA TRIBAL HATRED STRETCHES BACK TO THE WARS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. DURING BENIN'S MANY POLITICAL CRISES OF THE 1960'S, THE POSSIBILITY OF NIGERIAN ANNEXATION OF BENIN'S PREDOMINANTLY YORUBA OUEME PROVINCE WAS ENCOURAGED BY REGIONAL LEADERS. SIMILAR TRIBAL PROBLEMS EXIST BETWEEN THE FON AND BARIBA OF THE NORTHEAST, WHOSE AREA EXTENDS INTO NIGERIA.

3. THE GPRB VIEW OF THE PRESENT NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT IS EXTERNALLY FAVORABLE, BUT IN ACTUALITY THERE IS LITTLE CONTACT. DURING THE HOURS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT MURTALA, MARXIST-LENINIST BENIN'S VOICE WAS BROADCASTING MESSAGES OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE "REVOLUTIONARY" YOUNG COUP PLOTTERS. ONLY AFTER IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE COUP HAD FAILED DID THE REQUIRED EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF BEGIN TO FLOW FROM THE "VOICE OF THE REVOLUTION". ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS BEYOND BORDER CLOSING ENGENDERED BY BENIN'S SOMEWHAT PRECARIOUS INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION AND DESIRES TO CAUSE DISCOMFORT FOR TOGO, THE GPRB WOULD BE MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE WITH A MORE LEFTIST REGIME IN LAGOS, FOR PURELY IDEOLOGICAL REASONS.

4. GPRB IS RESPECTFUL OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC STRENGTH AND DOMINANT POLITICAL POSITION IN BLACK AFRICA. WHEN COMMON
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VIEWS ARE HELD, GPRB IS STRONG IN PRAISE FOR NIGERIA. WHEN FMG ESPOUSES MORE MODERATE STANDS OR MAKES FRIENDLY GESTURES TOWARD WEST, NO MENTION OF THIS IS MADE IN GPRB MEDIA OR OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS.

5. POST CONCLUDES THAT GPRB WILL NOT VOLUNTARILY ACCEPT NIGERIA AS SPOKESMAN FOR AFRICA IN ANY CONCILIATORY MOVE TOWARD WEST OR US BUT DIRECT INFLUENCE BY NIGERIA COULD STIFLE POTENTIAL GPRB DISSENT. CREAGER

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